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ABSTRACT

A convocation address at St. Lawrence University, New York, considers the purpose of the curriculum, expectations of the curricula, and the promise that it represents. It is suggested that the curriculum comprises a set of experiences, most of which are organized as courses, selected to facilitate a student's progress toward defined educational goals. Some goals are set by the college, some by the student. The courses should be mutually reinforcing, and their relationship to the goals should be apparent to the students required to take them. The curriculum should be appropriate to the mission of the college as well as the kinds of students taking it. It is proposed that there are three types of curricula, and that they represent the demands made by society on higher education. The nature of the vocational curriculum, the professional curriculum, and the civic curriculum is considered. Because the curriculum is an expression of an institution's purpose, it needs to be monitored regularly. Internal and external influences on the academic department and curricula, the primary role of the faculty in relation to the institution's mission, the role of the trustees, and the administration are examined. (SW)

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Director of Academic Affairs
Indiana Commission for Higher Education

Convocation Address at St. Lawrence University,
Canton, New York, September 4, 1980

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Dr. Angelo, President Piskor, Dean Gibson, distinguished visitors, members of the board and of the faculty, students: I am pleased to be here for the start of your 126th academic year.

I know the convention of saying one is pleased to have been invited somewhere sounds trite, but I have enjoyed preparing for this meeting, so I am pleased for the chance to share my thoughts and to convey the reason for my enjoyment.

In addition to the satisfaction, though, there has been trepidation, because the convocation address is a challenging form of rhetoric. It must not only stimulate thought, it must do so for an audience more diverse than any other in a college's history. You include students of all ages, faculty of all ranks, administrators at all levels, trustees, family members, and guests.

The invitation to share some ideas about how to think about the curriculum prompted several thoughts. Your process of evaluation--"The Decade Ahead" Project--could be thought of as planning for

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reform, and I could talk about curriculum reform, a subject that is much in the news these days. Who on a college campus has not heard of Harvard's general education report? Those interested in reform also learn about Project GEM (General Education Models), which has received funding from both private and public sources, and has issued several reports. And there are others, including one with which I was involved at Cornell. But none has much real progress to report. Why?

It may be that the lack of progress reflects a conflict in the values of the reformers, each of whom usually has in mind a set of changes which will serve particular ends, but not necessarily the ends of those who must implement the reforms or of the institution which must incorporate the curriculum. Reform groups also seem to have difficulty because reformers bring answers to bear before questions are clear, and because such groups are made up of specialists from different fields.

The best expression I have read of this latter point—the world view of specialists--is by the great mathematician G. H. Hardy. In his superb autobiography, A Mathematician's Apology, required reading for deans and faculty committee members, he starts by saying:

> It is a melancholy experience for a professional mathematician to find himself writing about mathematics. The function of a mathematician is to do something, to prove new theorems, to add to mathematics, and not to talk about what he or other mathematicians have done. Statesmen despise publicists, painters despise art-critics, and physiologists, physicists, or mathematicians have usually similar feelings; there is no scorn more profound, or on the whole more justifiable, than

> that of the men who make for the men who explain. Exposition, criticism, appreciation, is work for second-rate minds. (Cambridge, 1969, p.61.)

Perhaps curriculum change is controversial not only because of competing values about what should be taught, and the frequent failure to respect other opinions, but also because scholars tend to think that to talk about something like mathematics -- or philosophy, or physics, or literature -- is simply not as important as doing it.

So I concluded that to talk about reform would not be useful. I decided that I should suggest something about the overarching purposes of that which is under scrutiny rather than propose what it ought to be.

With these thoughts as guides, I wondered if I could make a contribution to your process by suggesting some ideas about the nature of the curriculum: by suggesting ways to consider its purpose, the expectations we have for it, and the promise that it represents. To do so, I have chosen the metaphor of covenant.

A covenant is a special form of agreement. It is more than consensus, and more than a lease. "It is more than promise, but less than an oath." (Caryl, Sacred Covenant I, 1643.) Yet it is intended to be binding and requires a solemn exchange.

The contemporary philosopher William May has used the term covenant in this way:

> "A covenantal ethic is much more helpful in defining relations between people who have

> substantial dealings with one another -- a husband and wife, a professional and his client, [teachers and students,] a researcher and a host people, a sovereign and her people. In the scriptures of Israel (where the notion of covenant arose to religious prominence in the West) a covenant defines the relations between God and his people. At the heart of a covenant is an exchange of promises, an agreement that shapes the future between two parties... a covenantal ethic acknowledges the indebtedness of one to another... It emphasizes gratitude, fidelity, even devotion, and care. A covenantal ethics is responsive and reciprocal in character. It acknowleges a two way process of giving and receiving. ("The Bearing of Ethical Theories on Fieldwork," William F. May, Indiana University, p. 23.)

Religious history contains many examples of covenants, including those of God and Noah; God and the people of Israel; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the Law of Moses; and the covenants of the Scottish Presbyterians. In the history of international relations, the League of Nations, which never fulfilled the hopes of its founders, was nevertheless an event of decisive importance -- and it rested on a covenant.

The word covenant has had a distinguished career. Let us now think about its characteristics and how they have meaning for a college curriculum.

As I have said, a covenant is a special form of agreement between two or more parties. It requires a mutual promise, mutual esteem for one another, mutual respect for some form of authority, mutual obligations, mutual expectations, and mutual indebtedness. A covenant is a stable agreement, yet it holds the possibility of change -- but such change must respect the rights of the other parties. It requires

interdependence, freedom, and responsibility. These fundamental precepts have special meaning for a college curriculum because the curriculum is the manifestation of an institution's view of society. This view -- or vision -- may have started with one person, as it did at Cornell with White, at Harvard with Eliot, at Hopkins with Gilman, at Chicago with Hutchins. (I have only a hint of what Owen D. Young meant to St. Lawrence, so I don't want to say too much or too little about him.) My point is that institutional founders -- or re-founders -- often have a vision that defines the role of the institution and becomes its mission. The sociologist Burton Clark has expressed a theory about this. According to Clark,

> All organizations have a social role, ways of behaving linked with defined positions in the larger society, but only some have seized their role in the purposive way that we can call a mission. Then, among those that have been strongly purposive, only some are able to sustain and develop the mission over time to the point of success and acclaim. The mission is then transformed into an embracing saga. We are able to speak then of colleges [and other organizations] that become legendary, even heroic, figures on the social stage. (Burton R. Clark, The Distinctive College, Aldine, 1970, p. 8.)

This mission -- this covenant -- is expressed in the curriculum.

Clark Kerr has said, "...the curriculum is nothing less than the statement a college makes about what, out of the totality of man's constantly growing knowledge and experience, is considered useful, appropriate, or relevant to the lives of educated men and women at a

certain point in time." (Clark Kerr, Foreward to Curriculum by Frederick Rudolph, Jossey-Bass, 1977, p.ix.) In his history of the college curriculum, Rudolph says that it is an institutional expression of social purpose, a "social artifact." (pp. 3 and 52.)

The curriculum comprises a set of experiences, most of which are organized as courses, selected to facilitate a student's progress toward defined educational goals. Some goals are set by the college, some by the student. The courses should be mutually reinforcing, and their relationship to the goals should be apparent to the students required to take them. The curriculum should be appropriate to the mission of the college as well as to the kinds of students taking it. Thus, there is no ideal curriculum for all students or all colleges. (Edwin P. Martin, "Innovative Programs and Curricula," in Strategies for Significant Survival, Jossey-Bass, 1975, pp. 23-32.)

The curriculum may appear in several forms and express several philosophies. Martin (ibid) cites career education, general education, experiential education, and a variety of other formulations. Toombs discusses three types of curricula: the academic, the social interactive, and the applied. (William Toombs, "Viewing the University Curriculum," Pennsylvania State University, 1979.) Gerald Grant and David Riesman posit, chronicle, and examine several different conceptions of the curriculum, which include the

multiversity ideal, the popular reforms, and the telic reforms: the neoclassical, the aesthetic-expressive, the communal-expressive, and the activist-radical. (The Perpetual Dream: Reform and Experiment in the American College, Chicago, 1978.)

For our purposes, I want to suggest that there are three types of curricula, and that they represent the demands made by society on higher education. In Rudolph's terms, they are the utilitarian, the democratic, and the professional. (p. 278.) I prefer to call them the vocational, the civic, and the professional. There is, of course, some overlap among them, but by and large each has unique objectives. Each is underscored by assumptions about the skills which students bring to their studies and about how students will use their college education.

The vocational curriculum may vary from a few days to several years in length, but it is designed primarily with the interests of employers in mind. It is a prescribed, instrumental, and technical course of study which admits of few questions. It is because employers wish it, whether it is in laser technology, bowling lane management, or auto care.

The professional curriculum, at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, is dominated by faculty and practitioners. It is designed with the interests of a profession as its paramount concern, whether the profession be business, home economics, linguisitics, anthropology, education, chemistry, or architecture. (Engineering is

an interesting exception; its requirements for the first professional degree are not as narrow as those of other professions'.)

In contrast, the civic curriculum and its covenants are a complex mix of ideals. There is no single model; each college must create its own. The civic curriculum is not just general education or liberal arts, as it is often called, but a program for citizenship, for civilianship. It is liberal in its form of inquiry. It encourages intellectual growth. The civic degree is a preparation for living, for wondering why. It purports not just to teach one how to earn a living, but how to live. It offers instruction and experience in both technique and vision -- the ultimate combination in education.

I cite two contemporary commentators for support. In a recent issue of Newsweek, retired Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale (Annapolis Classmate of President Carter and CIA director Stansfield Turner, a Medal of Honor winner, and the man who organized American prisoner-of-war resistance during his nearly eight years in Hanoi prisons) expressed the major characteristic of what I call a civic degree by stating,

> A liberally educated person meets new ideas with curiosity and fascination. An illiberally educated person meets new ideas with fear. (September 1, 1980, p. 83.)

In a similar vein, Michael M. Thomas (Yale magna, Phi Beta Kappa, former curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, former partner at Lehman Brothers, former director of 20th Century-Fox Films, former

senior vice president and director of what is now Drexel Burham Lambert, and at 44 a private financial consultant with offices in Dallas and New York) said in a recent interview:

> Much of [why business leadership lost its way] has to do with lack of general liberal arts literacy in the business community and the notion that all managers need is a degree from one of the leading business schools.
>
> [What they need is] a broader vision. A sense of history. Perspectives from literature and art. Sit on an airplane and look what businessmen are doing; most of the time they're making lists. I've never seen them reading literature or general interest magazines, which help put current events in perspective. The problem is that the future comes up very quickly and hits you in the face. In 1975, right after the oil embargo, I told my clients the soft night air is filled with the sound of chickens coming home to roost. (New York Times, August 21, 1980, p. 26.)

The civic curriculum as I call it -- you may call it the liberal arts or something else, but be sure it fulfills the same objectives -- has surprisingly diverse attributes. In it, students gain the confidence to take initiative, solve problems, and formulate ideas; they develop skills in language, learning, and leadership. They also learn about domestic and foreign culture, history, mathematics, science, and technology. The civic curriculum emphasizes reasoning in different modes; clear and graceful expression in written, oral, and visual communication; organizational ability; tolerance and flexibility; creativity; and sensitivity to the concerns of others and to ethical and aesthetic values.

These are the aspirations of the civic degree: to teach the ordinary student to be a cultured person; to develop in students the capacity to check assumptions and to understand the value-laden choices that

await them as consumers, decision-makers, and arbiters of ethical choices at home, at work, and at the ballot box; to help students understand and build a civilization compatible with the nature and aspirations of human beings and the limitations of the environment. These are ideals which are open to students of any age or station, and to any faculty; they are not the province of a particular department or school.

Such a curriculum must be designed; it cannot just happen by accident. And its purposes, functions, structures, components, substances, and participants must be considered as part of the basic design. As Raymond Loewy might say, simplicity must be foremost; human values must transcend technological values; and democratic -- nay civic -- values must overcome the desire for exclusivity.

The curriculum, as I have tried to argue, is an expression of an institution's purpose; it is created in fulfillment of an institution's mission. And like any objective -- or mission -- it must be monitored regularly, because activities which flow naturally from goals statements may atrophy, and counter activities may develop. The influences for change are great.

The undergraduate curriculum in its many designs is the result of both external and internal forces, any of which may cause change. External influences include the general (such as the public, the media, and the church); opportunities for graduates (such as professions and occupations, and graduate and professional schools); intellectual and

academic influences (such as new knowledge, the activities of other colleges, learned and professional societies, textbooks, and foundations); regulation (such as governmental agencies, accrediting agencies, courts, and collective bargaining); procedural influences (such as transfer students and competition); and other forces (such as high school graduates and curricula, and budgets). (Carnegie Council, Missions of the College Curriculum, Jossey-Bass, 1977, p. 29.)

Internal influences include academic departments, the college or other academic division, the president and academic deans, individual faculty members, students, the extracurriculum (ibid, p. 65), and what Benson Snyder at M.I.T. has called the "hidden curriculum," those powerful but unintended forces set to work by administrative and academic actions. (Benson R. Snyder, The Hidden Curriculum, Knopf, 1971.)

Although the sources of influence are many and varied, the parties to the covenant which is the curriculum are few: faculty, trustees, administration, and students. But their roles and responsibilities are complex.

The concept of role, which is part of both the professional and the common language of literary criticism, philosophy, theatre, and sociology, is among the most complex and fundamental concepts of society. It has been conceptualized as

> a pattern of behavior and sentiment, organized in relation to presumed motivations, and frequently but not always connected to a specified organizational position. (C. Gordon, "Role and

Value Development Across the Life-Cycle." In Role, Sociological Studies 4, edited by J. A. Jackson, Cambridge, 1972, pp. 65-106.)

By contrast, the concept of responsibility is used so often that it is presumed to be well known. Nevertheless, I will state my understanding of it. A responsibility is an obligation, either legal or ethical, for the trustworthy performance of duties and the consequent awareness of the penalty for failure to do them. But, as Alexander Hamilton said, "Responsibility in order to be reasonable must be limited to objects within the power of the responsible party." (Federalist No. 63, II, 193.) In other words, responsibility is tempered by role.

The primary role of the faculty is to create and teach a curriculum which is based on the institution's mission. It follows, therefore, that faculty will be appointed with the institution's purposes in mind. The faculty has responsibility for setting the intellectual or "learning" tone on campus. The faculty must also be concerned about the development of students as persons of intellect and values who will participate actively in society. As advisors they have opportunities to help students find both courses and conversations. These obligations of the faculty affect them as teachers, scholars, and members of the college community.

It is the faculty's role to help set and to exemplify the high standards and values to which the institution aspires. They, and other parties to the covenant, represent the college in what they say and do, and should select as exemplars those who excel in teaching,

scholarship, and institutional service. There must, of course, be equality among faculty, but an equality of station, not of stature.

As one reviews a college's history, the names of certain faculty members will be prominent; they represent the achievements and aspirations of the institution. Every college must strive to identify these teacher-scholars early in their careers, to encourage them, and to involve them in institutional planning and decision-making.

In an essay which I commend to you all, Bart Giametti, president of Yale, wrote

> A liberal education is at the heart of a civil society, and at the heart of a liberal education is the act of teaching. To speak directly of how a liberal education prepares students for a civic role, I must begin with the teacher.
>
> The teacher chooses. The teacher chooses how to structure choice. The teacher's power and responsibility lie in choosing where everyone will begin and how, from that beginning, the end will be shaped. The choice of that final form lies in the teacher's initial act. ("The American Teacher," Harper's Magazine, July 198[illegible], pp. 24-29.)

Such power is awesome. But so are the powers over curriculum and hiring which have been assumed by many faculties. With such power goes responsibility, and in some places it is not fully exercised. Many discussions about general education and core courses seem simply to reassert the importance of faculty without any analysis of what the purpose of such study should be.

In his farewell letter to readers of Change Magazine, George Bonham develops his own version of this concern.

> Nonetheless, academic institutions as social organizations strike me as being in substantial danger of growing irrelevant. Disciplinary rigidities, the bureaucratization of much of academic life, intellectual arrogance, the general failure of faculty to show institutional interests, the trend toward ever narrower specializations in scholarship in the face of human needs to the contrary - all strike me as worrisome signs of decline. (George Bonham, Change Magazine, May-June 1980.)

I do not mean to suggest that Bonham's charge is universally true, or even true at St. Lawrence. But it is a sufficiently accurate statement about the academy in America that I take the charge seriously.

This is why I advance the metaphor of covenant. If a covenantal ethic became the norm, all teachers' minds as well as all students' minds would become gathering places; artificial barriers in the organization of knowledge and of colleges would exist no more.

In the American college and university, trustees are chartered as the institution's corporate authority. This contrasts sharply with the British experience where the faculty is the corporation. In the United States, governing boards have the responsibility to make the institutional mission an explicit instrument of educational policy. So to think of a covenant without their participation would be a mistake.

But where authority is present there is also inequality. When some person or group is the ruler, others are the ruled. A covenant requires consent, and this results in the legitimation of authority.

Those in positions of authority need the confidence of others, or else they must rely on force. In the words of Reinhard Bendix, "Legitimation achieves what power alone cannot, for it establishes the belief in the rightness of rule which, as long as it endures, precludes massive challenges." (Kings or People, California, 1978, p. 17.)

This form of authority has the character of auctoritas, or moral influence, which is an absolute necessity in a college. According to Burton Clark, such "organizations are much dependent on normative rather than utilitarian or coercive bonds." Normative bonds result in "moral capital," which provides the essence of institutional character: i.e., interpersonal trust, institutional belief, and the capacity to cope during a crisis. ("The Wesleyan Story: The Importance of Moral Capital," in Academic Transformation, edited by David Riesman and Verne A. Stadtman, McGraw-Hill, 1973, p. 381.)

These bonds require nurturing, and it is the careless board which either ignores such concerns or leaves them to last in its list of priorities. It is not even enough to assume that the administration has responsibility for moral capital. A board might just as well ignore the condition of fiscal capital.

This is not to say that trustees should be involved in the day to day affairs of the campus. They should not. This is the role they have delegated to the administration.

The role of administration is to help achieve the mission of the college or university by ministering to the needs of faculty and students as they engage in the central activity of learning. Administrators tend to the environment of the institution. They are charged with having a broad, overall view, and are expected to coordinate, initiate, convene, and otherwise help make possible the conversations that promote discussions and common understandings.

The administration, which is born of a president who is appointed by the trustees -- and who represents their most important decision -- is accountable for the management of institutional resources and the fulfillment of the mission. Neither committee nor caucus can accept these responsibilities. This is not to deny that others may either contribute to or challenge the performance of the administration, and bring a case before the trustees. After all, the administration must also set and meet standards. But it does affirm the fact that the administration has the responsibility and, therefore, must have the authority to minister to the mission of the institution.

The soul of administration is leadership. Leadership requires earned respect and good faith responses, and offers inspiration, ideas, standards, and support in terms of dollars and service. Leadership provides a vision to which all can rally, claim as their own, and become more purposeful in their activities.

In this critical decade ahead, when institutions of all types will have to cope with the results of reduced growth, administrators will

have a particularly challenging time. Improvements by addition are easier to handle than improvements by substitution, and even in well-endowed, selective institutions, faculty spirit will be affected by the condition of the professoriate at large. These are the issues which will face every administration: faculty vitality and institutional morale. The wise administrator will learn early that the collegiate enterprise is held together by a covenant, and that the several parties with standing must participate in decision-making. It may be that James Perkins was correct, that the internal cohesion which "may be achieved by university-wide administrative and decision-making structures cannot effectively tackle the complicated problems of limitation of size, allocation of resources, modification of the curriculum, and all the rest." But remember the remainder of his advice:

> Reform [or progress] without participation is unthinkable while [progress] without decisions is unbelievable. Administrations must digest both necessities (Reform of Higher Education: Mission Impossible?, ICED, New York, 1971, p. 10.)

Your concern about and for students is reflected in the report entitled, "The Decade Ahead," Volume 1. (I hope Volume II will report in a similar vein on the skills required of faculty and administrators in the decade ahead!) To be sure, students are the reason for the discussion. Without them, the discussion would be irrelevant. It would be, in the worst sense of the term, academic -- unaware of the outside world. But what then is the student's role as party to this covenant? Is he, or she, the client? Or should the student be considered a customer, an apprentice, or a consumer? In my view,

society is the client of the covenant, and the student is a partner to it.

Students and faculty must be thought of as partners because that is how education works best. To paraphrase Mark Van Doren, "a civic education is difficult at best, and the student must do most of the work. But this does not mean that no one should tell him what the work is." (Liberal Education, Beacon Press, 1959, p. 110.) Without such advice, the education will be second best because it will lack symmetry. It will, except in rare cases, also lack connectedness. Van Doren states this view:

> Education sees the world as a wedding of several parties, none of which loses identity in the process, but all of which remain connected. The connectedness of things is what the educator contemplates to the limit of his capacity. No human capacity is great enough to permit a vision of the world as simple, but if the educator does not aim at the vision no one else will, and the consequences are dire when no one does... The student who can begin early in life to think of things as connected, even if he revises his view with every succeeding year, has begun the life of learning... [The pity is that it happens so seldom. Too often] there are gaps for them, as for their professors, between poetry and mathematics, between science and ethics, between philosophy and politics; their advance through these "subjects" is not on a single front; they do not study proportion as something equally present in arithmatic, in geometry, in architecture, in music, in physics, in the human body, and in poetry where its name is metaphor; they do not study form as something common to mathematics, metaphysics, and morals; they do not study tragedy as a process of ideas parallel to the course of calamity in the lives of persons. If they did, their leisure hours -- so necessary to the studious career -- might themselves possess a center, and the work unconsciously done in idleness might have results worth waiting for. (p. 116.)

The curriculum provides the common ground for students and faculty to work together, for faculty to talk with faculty, and for students to talk with fellow students in ways that make the covenant and its commitment to excellence live. For a covenant is nothing if it is not used.

The public part of this conversation with myself and with you must now come to a close. But I will not put aside your inquiry; and I hope you now understand why I have enjoyed thinking about it. My hope is that I may have shared an idea of some value to one of you, or have at least confirmed an idea or two of your own.

There are, of course, other subjects one could bring to a talk such as this. But like Giametti's teacher, I had to make a choice, and I chose this path. For example, your theme of the decade ahead could have brought forth a litany of demographic and social issues -- but you have no doubt heard them all. If I were to say anything in particular about this decade ahead, it would be to reinforce the Carnegie Council's report that colleges with strong and positive identities have a much better chance than others of surviving the coming downturn.

Let me conclude then by sharing the thoughts of two great thinkers about education and human aspiration: Lao-tzu of the 5th century B.C.E. and Cardinal Newman of the 19th century. Lao-tzu said there are three great treasures in life for which all should aspire: "frugality, compassion, and the desire not to be foremost in

everything." Newman said that the purpose of education is to "seek a comprehensive view of life, without which technical skill, however refined, may well be misdirected, and scholarship, however subtle, will be barren." What better foundations for a curriculum covenant can there be, I ask, than these?

Thank you.